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# Rhetoric, Reality, and the Revolution: The Genteel Radicalism of Gordon Wood

Michael Zuckerman

THE wisdom—and the warning—are almost as old as Western civilization itself. “We would often be sorry,” says the Aesop fable, “if our wishes were gratified.”<sup>1</sup>

Ten years ago, I wished for a return to synthesis. I appealed to history teachers to move beyond the recovery of American communities and subcultures and to take up once more the task of reconceiving America whole. I implored my colleagues to seek and to set forth focally the significance of their multitudinous monographs.<sup>2</sup>

I was not the only one to beg for such reintegration, nor by any means the first. The fragmentation of American history that worried me worried others as well. The splintering of the historical profession that troubled me troubled others too. Hayden White and a host of others began speaking seriously of narrative. In his presidential address to the American Historical Association, Bernard Bailyn took the achievement of more embracing visions to be “the challenge of modern historiography.” In an essay on “Wholes and Parts,” Thomas Bender proclaimed “the need for synthesis in American history,” and the *Journal of American History* thought his proclamation so provocative that it convened a special symposium devoted to the issues he had raised.<sup>3</sup>

Gordon Wood began his reinterpretation of the American Revolution well before the current cry for such work gathered force. It is only opportune, not opportunistic, that his Pulitzer Prize-winning synthesis, sweeping over a vast span of American history and defining dramatic alterations of the political

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<sup>1</sup> Aesop, *Fables*, “The Old Man and Death.”

<sup>2</sup> Michael Zuckerman, “Myth and Method: The Current Crisis in American Historical Writing,” *The History Teacher*, XVII (1984), 219–245.

<sup>3</sup> White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987); Lawrence Stone, “The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History,” *Past and Present*, No. 85 (1979), 3–24; Bailyn, “The Challenge of Modern Historiography,” *American Historical Review*, LXXXVII (1982), 1–24; Bender, “Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History,” *Journal of American History*, LXXIII (1986), 120–136; David Thelen, “A Round Table: Synthesis in American History,” *ibid.*, LXXIV (1987), 107–130. See also Herbert Gutman, “The Missing Synthesis: Whatever Happened to History?” *The Nation*, CCXXXIII, No. 17 (Nov. 21, 1981), 521, 553–554. For a thoughtful contemporary comment to the contrary see Eric H. Monkkonen, “The Dangers of Synthesis,” *AHR*, XCI (1986), 1146–1157.

culture of the colonies and of the new nation, appears amid prayers for ambitious endeavors such as his.

Yet, for all its integrative audacity, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* seems to me unlikely to achieve the influence of his careful and comparatively constricted first book, *The Creation of the American Republic*.<sup>4</sup> For all its contemporary resonance, all its deliberate address to the travails of our own time, *Radicalism* seems to me incapable of energizing a generation of scholarship as *Creation*—a meticulous exhumation of an ideological world we have lost—did.

Maybe these are merely passing ironies of a work itself almost barren of conscious and compelling irony. Perhaps these are simply instances of Oscar Wilde's dismal dictum that "when the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers."<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the synthesis so many of us thought we sought can only be had at the expense of intricacies and entanglements we prize more than we had appreciated. Perhaps the cultural coherence we believed we had to retrieve can only be obtained at the cost of complexities essential to the comprehension of that culture.

Or perhaps *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* does not put our prayers to the test at all. Perhaps it does not really proffer the synthesis it purports. Perhaps it is simply not integrative, or integrated, or for that matter even very interesting.

Certainly, it does not offer us a synthesis in any conventional sense of the term. It is an odd, idiosyncratic book that nearly invents America anew. Its power rests in Wood's supple, ingratiating way with words, on his deep reading in the primary sources, and on his eye for evocative detail. It does not depend on his engagement with current scholarship.

Wood neither pays much attention to the redwoods on the landscape nor cuts through the kudzu. It is hard to think of major interpretations of colonial, early national, or Jacksonian society with which he concurs or with which his account could be readily reconciled. It is harder still to identify community studies or other specimens of the new social history that he takes on their own terms. When he does deign to draw on the proliferous monographic literature, he draws on it with disturbing selectivity, extracting what serves his schematic design, discarding all the rest.

In other cases, such determinedly partial readings of other people's research might be merely the condition of synthesis. In this case, what Wood dismisses is, again and again, what gives us the complexity and contrariety, the very grain, of history and of life.

Beyond its delectable details, Wood's new work seems to me essentially untouched by life. Despite its title, it strikes me as a book utterly and authentically in what Santayana called the genteel tradition.

It is a book of rhetoric uncontaminated by any significant sociology, a book that confines the American Revolution and America itself to what the

<sup>4</sup> Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992); Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, in *The Writings of Oscar Wilde*, Uniform Edition (London, 1907), VII, 266.

better and often the best sort wrote. It allows other Americans to appear primarily through the accounts of those in positions to pronounce upon them, and it presents them as an undifferentiated mass not because they were but because their betters saw them that way and because Wood identifies profoundly with their betters.

Wood simply excludes from any consequential place in his account the vision and the violence, the soaring and sometimes outlandish ideals, the seething and sometimes appalling passions of ordinary Americans. Or rather, he transmutes them all into simple ambitions of economic success. And in the exact tradition that Santayana scorned, he sets those transmutations forth in a bland parable of irresistible individualism, a comfortably conservative tale of a people finding its destiny and fixing it forevermore, a self-satisfied study of how, in the words of the dust jacket, "a revolution transformed a monarchical society into a democratic one unlike any that had ever existed."

It is a profoundly unpersuasive story. It cannot be squared with the secondary literature, and it cannot be squared with its own evidence either.

Acknowledged masters as well as monographers of early American history depict a colonial society far from monarchical.<sup>6</sup> But their depiction is no more damning than Wood's own. The second of the three parts of his study, on republicanism, is altogether incompatible with—and altogether more convincing than—the first of the three, on monarchy. It concedes, indeed, the democracy that developed in America before the Revolution, and it subverts as it does both the premise on which the book's developmental dynamic depends and the culmination toward which it drives.

In that second part, we are finally informed that the monarchical society and culture idealized in the first part were without a monarch and that the aristocratic configuration asserted in the first part was without aristocrats or, for that matter, peasants.

Wood grants that royal influence in the colonies was negligible. He confesses that none of the pretenders to aristocratic standing in the New World were wealthy enough to live on their estates and that their facades of disinterested and lordly leisure were fraudulent. He does not doubt that social status in the eighteenth century ultimately depended on little more than money and that even the richest Americans made and had far less money than their English counterparts. He does not dispute the observation of Charles Chauncy in the 1760s that there was "scarce a man in any of the colonies . . . that would be deemed worthy of the name of a rich man in

<sup>6</sup> For just a very few examples: Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), *Education in the Forming of American Society* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1960), and *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1968); Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1958); Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1972); David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1989); Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1988); and Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975). I do not even discuss a distinguished company of neo-Progressive historians of the era, whom Wood anathematizes all together.

Great Britain" or the remark of a visiting Englishman in the 1770s that George Washington himself would have stood "in point of rank only equal to the better sort of yeoman in England."<sup>7</sup>

Little as there was of assured gentility at the top of colonial society, there was less of a dependent peasant mass at the bottom. Small farmers did not defer or even submit to the dictates of mercantile masters; if anything, lords of the great provincial ports "often found themselves dependent" on petty producers in the countryside, where elite influence "rarely extended very far."<sup>8</sup> Wood knows perfectly well that the preponderant part of the adult white males in every province owned property, and owned it under the very same tenure that the self-styled gentry did. He knows, too, that the majority of white men everywhere could read, write, and vote. He admits that consultation and consent ordered both religious and familial life far more than they ever had in the Old World, and concession and coercion far less. He even insists, as if such insistence did not enfeeble his prior postulations of aristocratic prerogative, that the underlying drift of colonial economic and demographic development devastated hierarchy, turned land into a commodity more than a patrimony, made debt relations and contracts more commercial than patronal or deferential, corroded community, severed patriarchal ties, and "shattered" every traditional social bond, by the mid-eighteenth century if not before.<sup>9</sup>

By the nineteenth century America may have been, as Wood maintains, "the most egalitarian, most materialistic, most individualistic . . . society in Western history," but it was already all of that, on his own evidence, before the Revolution.<sup>10</sup>

If the treatment of monarchy awaits the treatment of republicanism (or the recollection of the vast weight of other writing on early America) for its refutation, the treatment of democracy subverts itself. Wood submerges his material in a rhetoric of regnant egalitarianism, but his material keeps bobbing back. His data do display a clamorous, clambering augmentation of ambition that he hails as the radical outcome of the Revolution, but they also exhibit, almost as richly, a persistence of hierarchical habits of mind that should, on his thesis, have abated with Independence.

Decades after the Declaration, the Federalists still governed the nation, and on Wood's analysis they did so by patronage, sycophancy, and the "dormant acquiescence" appropriate to an aristocratic regime. To the turn of the nineteenth century, Americans remained disposed to follow "great men faithfully as hounds do the horn," while "the great" themselves "were masters at creating feelings of inferiority and inequality among the common people." In truth, men of privilege and position hardly had to create such feelings, since Wood acknowledges that a popular psychology of "inferiority and inequality" was embedded in and supported by the "unspoken premises of the society . . . existing everywhere despite the republican revolution."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 287, 112–113.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 271–273.

A generation after the Revolution, contemporary commentators claimed that the overwhelming majority of Americans still looked up "with fear and awe" to the "deceiving few." A generation after the Revolution, Wood himself holds that common and ordinary people were still feeling "the deprivations and humiliations of being common and ordinary," still encountering "scorn" and "unbearing haughtiness" from the likes of the nineteenth-century mayor of New York who acted "as if he thought a poor man had no more right than a horse" and hated the common people "from his own soul."<sup>12</sup>

Just as Wood exaggerates aristocratic and discounts egalitarian elements in his idealization of pre-Revolutionary monarchy, he equally but oppositely trumpets leveling innovations and mutes hierarchical persistences in his exaltation of post-Revolutionary democracy. He cannot countenance the obvious implication of continuing tension between aristocracy and democracy because it would attenuate the ineluctable linearity of his interpretation and vitiate the only sort of significance he can attach to the Revolution.

The role of the Revolution in Wood's schematic sequence would be problematic enough even if it were not predicated on a monarchical society that never was. In occasional rhetorical effusions in the text, the Revolution transforms America. But in the body of the book, and especially in the second part, it is simply a series of "clarifying incidents" in a much "larger story" driven by "basic forces" of population and production. Its impact is confirmative rather than causative. The "extraordinary demographic and economic developments," the "sudden," "spectacular," and "shattering" "structural shifts," the "immense . . . transformation" of family life, the "intense and widespread" "revolution against patriarchal authority"—all occurred before the Revolution. They did not depend on it. If anything, Wood intimates, it depended on them.<sup>13</sup>

Such indifference to the logic of characterization and causation mars the exposition at its most trifling transitions as well as at its most crucial junctures. Wood propels his story by sheer rhetorical affirmation more than by any compelling evidence or argument. He can do so because his story rests on rhetoric, selectively quoted and impressionistically assembled, to begin with. Most of Wood's quotations could support a contrary interpretation as readily as the one he offers at any given moment, and most of them could be countered by other quotations he doesn't invoke or invokes elsewhere to elaborate some other interpretation. The one-sidedness of his appropriation of the quotations he culls calls to mind the old-fashioned historical method on which historical synthesis once rested, the method that drove a fair part of my generation and his to the social sciences and to social history.

In that old-fashioned method, America was—and in Wood's book America is—coincident with the rhetoric in the elite archives. The country and the culture are homogeneous, and its homogeneity is expressed by affluent white northeastern males. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* is, aside from a few defensive maneuvers, essentially untouched by the issues that have preoccupied innovative scholars of the last generation. It denies

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 275, 277–278, 307.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 124–125, 133–134, 149–150.

class at every turn. It disregards race, gender, and ethnicity almost entirely. It is oblivious to region, in obvious ways such as its exclusion of the South from the nation after Independence and in subtle ways such as its dismissal of the Mid-Atlantic in the assertion of early monarchy and its primary reliance upon the area in its subsequent postulation of equality.

But more even than the book discounts such divisions, it discounts division itself. In that regard, it is less wrong than flat. It applauds democracy without diversity, equality without embattlement. It advances its theses with the tenacity of a lawyer's brief but without the density or acknowledged discordance, the complexity or encompassed contradiction, of life. It telegraphs almost all its punches, and it engages almost none of the tension and contestation that have animated American culture and society.

I don't want to belabor what Wood leaves out, except to say that even on his own terms those elements matter far more than he allows. His inexplicable elision of slavery from the story of advancing equality misses the effect of the institution on masters as well as slaves, misses Jefferson's anxiety that black servitude "nursed, educated, and daily exercised" whites in "the most boisterous passions" and "the most unremitting despotism," misses, in other words, the ways in which slavery precluded inculcation of the kind of character Wood claims republicanism and democracy alike required.<sup>14</sup>

Wood deals with this difficulty by dismissing the South as he dismisses slavery; no phrase recurs more often in the third section than "in the North at least." Consequently, he never confronts the sectional questions that would seem central to his professed concern for the bonds that united the new nation. Ultimately, Wood sees nothing but conscience—"the self-restraint of individuals," the very self-restraint that slavery made so implausible in southerners—that could have averted anarchy.<sup>15</sup> But that is only because, in a book that purports to be about the ties that held a fragile society together, he has no more interest in women and families than he does in sectionalism.

Even after he has shrunk America to a country without slaves, women, families, or the South, Wood must still deny a great deal of dissidence and diversity to sustain his thesis. Let me suggest just three examples.

Take first his treatment of the republican Enlightenment as, above all, "the spread of what came to be called civilization." Richard Bushman has recently shown that such civilization was unmitigatedly, unembarrassedly aristocratic rather than republican or democratic. It represented a cultural ideal consciously derived from the royal courts, and it expressed a class aspiration consciously committed to setting some people above others. Indeed, it demanded that the vulgar be excluded from genteel activities, so that the polite could be distinguished by their isolation from the common. If, as Wood says, "courtesies, amenities, [and] civilities" were "at the heart of the Enlightenment," then so too were deliberate social differentiation and a proud repudiation of equality.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *The Portable Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1975), 214.

<sup>15</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 333.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 192, 193.

Where Bushman finds in manners the mirror of a multitude of intriguing social conflicts, Wood finds only the measure of monolithic coherences and solidarities "that characterized the age." In republican America, "politeness, good manners, and elegance" are unequivocally "the defining characteristics of the new society." In democratic America, on the other hand, "pushing and shoving," "aversion to ceremony," and "want of etiquette" are equally if oppositely epidemic, in Wood's flat and flagrantly false proposition that "all restraints were falling away." In neither America can Wood's schema confront the intriguing coexistence of the crude and the decorous.<sup>17</sup>

Take next Wood's treatment of the emergence of middle-class society. By the 1810s, on his account, "in the North at least . . . the so-called middle class was all there was." "Middling sorts . . . drained the vitality from both the aristocracy and the working class." "Work became respectable, and nearly every adult white male became a gentleman."<sup>18</sup>

Wood's central argument, the universalization of the middle class, runs counter to the two most extensive recent studies of the rise of the middle class, Stuart Blumin's and Richard Bushman's, without ever deigning to deal with the insistence of both those studies that the new middle class defined itself oppositionally and consequently could not have been "all there was."<sup>19</sup>

His peripheral arguments, the draining of vitality from the upper and lower classes and the making respectable of manual labor, run counter to common sense as well as to the scholarship. It seems self-evident that the working class had scant vitality to be drained in the eighteenth century, when there were so few cities and so little industry. A working class and a working-class consciousness of consequence arose, exactly in Wood's era of egalitarian democracy, on the realistic recognition that not nearly "every adult white male" was "a gentleman." It seems similarly obvious that advancing industrialization de-skilled and debased some laborers as it legitimated and lifted others. And if we include among laborers the farmers, the slaves, and the women whom Wood never does, we come to still more suggestive complications. If we see that farm work became increasingly unattractive to sons of farmers, that slavery inevitably entailed adverse associations with work, and that wives, the essential bearers of middle-class mores, had by the nineteenth century's new notions of true womanhood and domesticity to be kept from work, then we may begin to engage the tantalizing tangles of work and social status that Wood will not.

Take finally Wood's treatment of equality. The subject would seem to demand meditation on complexity if not paradox, since Wood himself acknowledges that "wealth was far more unequally distributed in the decades following the Revolution than it had been before" and that "would-be gentlemen continued to dominate high public office" to the very end of the time he

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 194, 306–307.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>19</sup> Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760–1900* (Cambridge, 1989); Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York, 1992). See also, e.g., Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975).



studies. But *Radicalism* essays no such meditation. "Early-nineteenth-century Americans felt more equal," Wood assures us, and "that was what mattered."<sup>20</sup>

I do not know how Wood can be so confident of what those men and women felt or of how much it mattered. I do know that his serene assessment of their feelings is based, in the book, on a selective quotation that disregards a vast mass of contemporary comments acerbic, to say the least, about the calous carriage of new merchant-princes and captains of industry. I do know that his one-sided treatment of popular sentiment makes simpletons of the very common people he professes to celebrate. I do know that, when he embraces the claim that £100,000 conferred no greater privilege on a man than £5, he must live in some other country than I do.<sup>21</sup> In the conversation I catch, at the barbershop, at the playground, at the pizza place, I get the distinct impression that my fellow citizens not only believe but also take quite for granted that the rich get greater privilege than the poor when they go to court, when they deal with the police, when they are sick, when they need an abortion, when their kids seek admission to college or go looking for a good job. I do know that Wood's ideological construction of the Pollyanna-ish optimism of ordinary Americans ignores their realism and their cynicism.

When Wood tells us that the United States became "the most egalitarian nation in the history of the world, and it remains so today," because Americans "believe that no one in a basic down-to-earth . . . manner [is] really better than anyone else,"<sup>22</sup> I am less put off that this formulation is an apologia for our stark inequalities and our increasing indifference to them, less put off that this proposition is incorrigibly chauvinistic in its assurance that there is only one kind of equality and one kind of earth to be down to, less put off that this assertion is so vague as to be altogether beyond disconfirmation, than I am put off that the argument is so simplistic. I do not doubt that some Americans some of the time believe that no one is really better than anyone else. But some Americans some of the time take their inferiority as a given; that is one of what Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb included among the hidden injuries of class.<sup>23</sup> Some Americans some of the time adore royalty, idolize athletes and entertainers, fantasize that their existence will be transformed if they win the lottery. Most white Americans think themselves, and in Wood's America almost all white Americans thought themselves, better than black Americans. Many male Americans think themselves better than female Americans. Many straights think themselves better than gays. All of these beliefs and a multitude of others of the same ilk are at least as real and as potent as the egalitarianism on which Wood would have us fixate. I do not see what it profits us, except in empty self-congratulation, to fasten on that single strand of the national psyche and set aside all the rest.

Likewise, when Wood tells us that American identity was "a matter of common belief and behavior" and that the core of that common belief and

<sup>20</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 340, 304, 340.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 233, 234.

<sup>23</sup> Sennett and Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York, 1973).

behavior was "freedom to be left alone . . . to make money and pursue happiness," since self-interest was "all most Americans had in common,"<sup>24</sup> I am less put off that this is an ideological conception of American identity that aligns itself exactly with the elite effort to make America liberal in the early nineteenth century than that this ideological conception can catch so little of so many other powerful conceptions of the bonding beliefs and behaviors of a pluralistic society—so little of the self-sacrifice of mothers or the mutuality and conviviality of urban artisans or the free-form eye-gouging and ball-breaking of frontier brawlers, of southern honor or midwestern evangelical moral surveillance, of planter paternalism or middle-class courtesy, of a teeming mass of Americans whose ends were intrinsic as often as instrumental, whose concerns were with maintaining face among fellows, with aggressive or hedonistic gratification, with collectivity and cordiality in the shop or parish or pub, with pleasing or placating their God, as often as with making it.

In short, I do not think that this book hears America very well or very interestingly. I do not think it catches and credits the contradictions and complexities of the country, or even of its own sources.

Look, to take a single example, at the journal of James Guild, the poor boy become rich whom Wood takes for a talisman of the new society. Guild works as a farm laborer, a peddler, a tinker, a profile cutter, a miniaturist, all in vain, until one day he realizes that he would be "one of the happiest fellows in the world If I could only be rich." From the moment of that realization on, his "sole object" is "to make money," and he does.<sup>25</sup>

Guild's epiphany about money and his subsequent success are a lot more problematic than Wood allows. They come only after a decade of dire inferiority feelings. Guild knows that peddling is a "low . . . , mean . . . calling." He accepts and even deliberately deepens his abasement, turning to tinkering in order to "sink to . . . a rank . . . so mean that no one would take notice" of him. He hesitates to go home for fear that his family and friends will despise him. His humiliation is unabating from 1810 to 1818, from the age of thirteen to the age of twenty-one. Never in all that time does he experience the slightest sense even of his own dignity, let alone of his worthiness to stand among gentlemen. When he comes finally to his conversion—his conclusion that life is lonely, that people are not what they seem, that he should trust no one and deceive everyone, that he should seek riches—he comes to it precisely as a revelation, not as an appropriation of the ambient culture. It hits him for the first time at age twenty-one. And even when it does, it does not open upon a new gospel of equality. His money made, he comes home and has his old master fetch him his horse and carriage as once he'd waited on his old master. His clothes stylish and his purse full, he looks at "the young ladies that [he] used to think so very nice" and decides that they look "more like servants Girls." The inversion of mastery and servitude, of condescension and awe, pleases him mightily. Equality never enters his mind.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 336.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 351–353.

Wood wants us to understand Guild as an archetypal American, but in Guild's own account of his life he is utterly aberrant. When he returns home, he finds his friends "content and happy, . . . strongly attached to one another, with 'no ambition to shine.'" And it is plainly his friends, not he, who represent the norm in a nation still only 7 percent urban in 1820. Wood mistakes this upwardly mobile monster for the universal American. Guild's own narrative argues otherwise.<sup>27</sup>

In Wood's valedictory paragraph, he maintains that men of the nineteenth century were "no longer interested in the revolutionaries' dream of building a classical republic" or "producing a few notable geniuses and great-souled men," and he hails the new generation for its keenness to create "a prosperous free society belonging to obscure people."<sup>28</sup>

It was simply never so simple. The new generation found its inspiration and embodiment in a great man, a man who seemed so kingly to so many that a powerful political party arose primarily to oppose him, under the ancient antimonarchical banner of whiggery. Andrew Jackson modeled himself exactly on the great men of the Revolution and of the classical past as well. He was one of the grandest planters of the southwest and the most famous military man in America, and he did not build his magnificent Greek Revival plantation house, the Hermitage, to emblazon his obscurity.

And he was not alone. As Roger Kennedy has shown so brilliantly, it was precisely the generation Wood would have indifferent to classical antiquity that rescued the republic from the economic and spiritual stagnation of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It was precisely the generation that raised Jackson "higher than a throne" that re-manned itself, after long years of commercial and cultural flaccidity, with literally hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of erections of classical columns. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Americans in Maine and Mississippi, in Indiana and Carolina, in great cities, county towns, and countryside put up public buildings and private residences patterned after Greek antiquity as no other nation in the world—including Greece—ever did.<sup>29</sup> Wood's peroration misses these tantalizing twists. It puts forth a Potemkin America, a cardboard propaganda piece. It is powerless to engage the contrapuntal complexity that makes the United States indeed the "wonder" of the world that his climactic paragraph celebrates.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 354.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 369.

<sup>29</sup> Roger Kennedy, *Greek Revival America* (New York, 1989). The quotation is from Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, chap. 26, a chapter Wood misconstrues as a paean to quotidian equality in *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 232–233.

<sup>30</sup> Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 369.